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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 5516
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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 3522
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0806
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0367
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU PRIORITY 0334
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 3005
RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000078

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BH](#) [NP](#) [AS](#)
SUBJECT: BHUTANESE REFUGEES: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

KATHMANDU 00000078 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Charge Nicholas Dean for reasons 1.4(b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) In recent meetings with Acting Foreign Secretary Bhagirath Basnet, UNHCR Representative Abraham Abraham, and Core Group Chair and Australian Ambassador Graeme Lade, RefCoord promoted coordinated donor action to encourage the Government of Nepal (GON) to adopt a resettlement policy. Basnet confirmed that the GON intended to hold at least one last bilateral with the Bhutanese government before agreeing to third-country resettlement. UNHCR Abraham reported that the census of Beldangi II camp was complete and that the census of all seven camps would finish in mid- to late April. Abraham welcomed coordinated donor action to encourage the GON to agree to resettlement. Ambassador Lade agreed in principle to send the same message to the GON on resettlement and believed other Core Group members, such as the Canadians and Dutch, would also be supportive. Lade believed that support for resettlement was widespread, but indicated that Australia would wait until after completion of the census to make a formal resettlement offer.

Acting Foreign Secretary Gives Nothing Away

¶2. (C) In a January 8 meeting, Acting Foreign Secretary Bhagirath Basnet could not predict when the Government of Nepal (GON) would hold the next bilateral discussion on Bhutanese refugees with the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB), noting it would be a political decision and would have to wait until the interim Government had been formed. RefCoord suggested that the GON pursue two tracks of negotiations -- one with the Bhutanese government on repatriation and the other with Core Group members on resettlement. (Note: Earlier, Foreign Ministry Joint Secretary Dinesh Bhattarai had suggested this possibility.

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End Note.) Basnet replied that only after the bilateral was

held could the GON make a decision on resettlement. In a later meeting, Australian Ambassador Graeme Lade noted his discussions with Basnet had also "drawn a blank," revealing no progress on scheduling the GON-RGOB bilateral or movement on adopting a resettlement policy.

UNHCR Reports Progress on Census, Urges Core Group Coordination

13. (SBU) In a January 9 meeting with UNHCR Country Representative Abraham Abraham, RefCoord learned that, although the UNHCR - GON census in the camps had been running efficiently, the census would likely finish in mid- to late April rather than the earlier target of mid-March. Abraham praised the GON's high level of cooperation, noting that local Home Ministry officials had gone out of their way to ensure a smooth operation. Abraham hoped to finalize the census assessment report by the end of May.

14. (SBU) RefCoord explained that the U.S. might soon extend a formal offer to the GON, and seek concurrence for a U.S. resettlement program. Abraham welcomed this news, opining that additional pressure on the GON to move forward with resettlement was necessary. He stated his preference for coordinated Core Group action on this proposal.

Australian Ambassador Supportive of U.S. Message

15. (C) On January 10, RefCoord met with Australian Ambassador to Nepal (and Core Group Chair), Graeme Lade at his invitation to discuss coordinated Core Group action to urge the GON to formulate a resettlement policy. RefCoord described the U.S. intention to make a formal resettlement offer and asked whether Australia might soon make a similar offer. While Lade said his government was not ready to make

KATHMANDU 00000078 002.2 OF 002

a concrete offer, he agreed in principle to sending the same message to the GON that it should move forward soon on resettlement. He noted the GON's desire to hold at least one last bilateral meeting with the RGOB before moving forward on resettlement, however. Lade agreed with RefCoord that, if Foreign Minister K.P. Oli were to keep his Cabinet position in an interim Government, the bilateral would be a box-checking exercise, after which the GON would likely move forward with resettlement. The assumption was that the GON had little hope of securing RGOB agreement on repatriation.

Growing Support For Resettlement

16. (C) Lade believed that there was growing support from all sides of the issue for a resettlement program. Specifically, he described a recent communication to the Australian High Commission in New Delhi from the RGOB supporting third-country resettlement. (Note: The RGOB has also communicated the same in a written letter to the Danish Embassy in New Delhi. End Note.) He also noted that, during the November Core Group visit to the refugee camps in southeastern Nepal, the seven camp Secretaries had appeared united in their support for third-country resettlement. RefCoord, however, noted the set back from the Bhutanese Foreign Minister's recent comments to Bhutan's Parliament that repatriation of Bhutanese refugees would be equivalent to importing terrorists. Within the refugee community, this had re-ignited the desire to hold the RGOB accountable for the expulsion as well as negative feelings towards resettlement.

More Resettlement Numbers Needed

17. (C) RefCoord noted that the ongoing census in the camps would not result in a dramatically reduced number of

refugees; contrary to previous predictions, and that the Core Group needed to find a solution for roughly 105,000 persons. With the U.S. offer to take 60,000 and perhaps another 20,000 to Canada and Australia, the fate of roughly 25,000 refugees remained undecided. Lade indicated that his government would wait until after the census was complete before offering to resettle a specific number of Bhutanese refugees. However, he suspected that Australia would eventually agree to a four-year program processing between 1,000 - 3,000 refugees annually. Lade agreed to press the GON on resettlement and believed that other Core Group members, such as the Dutch and Canadians, would also be supportive.

Comment

18. (C) In previous meetings with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister K.P. Oli had agreed that, after one more bilateral discussion with the RGOB, he would be ready to support development of a resettlement policy. A formal U.S. offer to resettle 60,000 Bhutanese refugees would provide FM Oli with ammunition to take to the Council of Ministers, would place additional pressure on the GON to move forward with scheduling the bilateral, and would eliminate a frequent GON claim that the U.S. has not informed Kathmandu "officially" of our resettlement offer. Post believes a formal U.S. request now for GON agreement on resettlement is necessary to get the ball rolling. The GON bureaucracy is world class -- we should expect the formulation of a resettlement policy to take six months or longer. Australia's support for a common Core Group message advocating formulation of a GON resettlement policy is positive; Australia could be a potential ally in Geneva. Post will continue to coordinate actions with Core Group members in Kathmandu to the maximum extent possible.

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